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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HELSINKI 000127

SIPDIS

NSC FOR JEFF HOVENIER

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TAGS: [EU](#) [FI](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: FINLAND'S SECURITY POLICY: EU AN END POINT OR
WAY-POINT?

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Classified By: CDA Michael A. Butler for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Media attention on the Finnish Government's (GOF) quadrennial defense and security white paper focused more on the "strong case" in favor of Finland's possible NATO membership than the fact that the document places primary importance on the European Union's role in promoting security. According to the GOF, the EU can combat a variety of threats - weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, resource scarcity, climate change - through its policies (crisis management, neighborhood) and "key role" in certain sectors (energy, transport). The white paper places particular importance on a "European solidarity" that would be strengthened by ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Reliance on the EU as a security promoter reflects wide public support for an EU security role and offers traditionalists a counterweight to NATO as the primary source of security in Europe. For others, including Foreign Minister Stubb and counterparts in the National Coalition Party, focus on the EU as font of security also provides a way-station on the route to eventual NATO membership. Ultimately, any decision regarding NATO membership is at least three years down the line, and will rest on public opinion about NATO, not the EU, and on the political will of the next government to take Finland into NATO. End summary.

NATO gets the attention ...

¶2. (C) Upon the January 23 release of Finland's quadrennial defense and security white paper, the media focused on its treatment of Finland's possible NATO membership (REF). The paper addresses Finnish-NATO relations in greater depth and more positively than the 2004 version; in a March 11 briefing on the paper for Embassy personnel, Defense Ministry officials emphasized the positive evolution of successive post-Cold War white papers' description of those relations. The paper states "strong grounds exist" for Finland's membership, but nevertheless concludes that the option to join will remain open. (NOTE: President Halonen has ruled out Finland's NATO membership during her tenure. END NOTE.)

¶3. (U) The paper highlights another important reason to pursue NATO cooperation (if not membership) - the U.S.'s role as sole remaining superpower and the most important NATO member. The paper departs in small but significant ways from prior treatment of the U.S. and the transatlantic relationship. Reflecting the U.S.-EU tensions over Iraq, the 2004 version refers to a U.S. readiness to act unilaterally, "bypassing well-established cooperation forums," and neutrally refers to "fostering" bilateral relations. The 2009 version dispenses with unilateralist references and

explicitly identifies the need for Finland to maintain close relations with the U.S.

... but EU gets top billing

14. (U) The media gave significantly less heed to the organization given the most prominent attention in the paper: the European Union. The paper describes the EU as "a fundamental security policy choice" because EU integration, enlargement, neighborhood policies and a "solid EU-Russia partnership" have strengthened Finland's security. In a March 12 briefing on the paper for the diplomatic corps, MFA Under Secretary Markus Lyra stressed the EU's importance in combating a broad range of threats, including crises and conflicts, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, resource scarcity and climate change. According to the paper, the EU affects security policy through such means as development of policies related to crisis management and internal security, and being a "key actor" in fields like energy and transport.

15. (C) For the GOF, "European solidarity" appears to be fundamental to the security benefits the EU provides, as the paper states EU Member States (MSs) belong to "a close-knit political grouping" that shares "the will to act in unison." The Lisbon Treaty's "solidarity clause" would not create a new obligation, rather it would reinforce existing "instruments and capabilities" and strengthen mutual solidarity. For Finland, a strong sense of solidarity reflects "the readiness to defend the other Member States by all available means," such that "Finland will provide assistance to the other Member States and expects others to

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act likewise." In his briefing Lyra stated that Finland's participation in crisis management operations, like the currently EU-led operation in Chad, demonstrates their willingness and ability to assist other MSs.

Fellow EU Members comment on Finland's position

16. (C) Speaking to Finnish perceptions of the EU, Dutch DCM Thomas van Leeuwen told Polchief that in the absence of membership of a military alliance like NATO, and with a sizable number of Finns uncertain about or opposing NATO membership, the Finns must necessarily look to the EU. Polish Political Counselor Stanislaw Cios told Polchief that in several bilateral meetings in Helsinki in February GOF officials emphasized the role of the EU as a "security promoter." Cios said both sides agreed that demonstrating the willingness and ability to participate in crisis management operations signals an expectation and acceptance of similar assistance. Cios also described frustration about the EU, with the Finns complaining of a lack of strategic thinking and cooperation; for example, on Afghanistan, they complained that at the political level EU officials are focused on and distracted by technical matters like the number of civilian slots for police trainers, something best left for the expert level. (NOTE: In a March 11 conversation with Charge, Lyra said some GOF officials are frustrated by the strong influence of France, Germany and the United Kingdom within the EU, and by the failure of the Lisbon Treaty to come into force. END NOTE.)

Security role for EU: necessary and sufficient?

17. (C) Across the coalition government and the political spectrum, there is a consensus that the EU plays a necessary role in advancing Finland's security interests. Polls show the public strongly considers the EU to be an important factor in increasing Finland's security. Whether the "EU factor" is sufficient depends on two things: (1) whom one asks, and (2) how one defines threats. On the former, roughly half of those polled feel Finland should remain

militarily non-aligned, reflecting a deeply-ingrained sense that Finland will always "go it alone" militarily and a concern about having to fight "someone else's war" as part of an alliance. Regarding threats, the white paper adopts a broad concept of threat that includes, for example, energy scarcity and climate change. For Finns who eschew military alliances, who deem military threats to Finland a distant prospect, and as see a strong EU role in addressing climate change and other challenges, the EU is a final destination. Within the coalition government, the center and center-left members - Center Party (of PM Vanhanen), Green Party and Swedish People's Party - more so than the center-right National Coalition Party (NCP) contain the strongest EU support.

18. (C) The NCP largely represents a different view, one that acknowledges an important role for the EU while arguing for the fundamental importance of NATO and Finland's eventual NATO membership. For supporters of this view, the EU might be seen as an enduring and integral component of a multi-faceted security policy, or more simply a way-station on the path to NATO membership. For them, the EU also serves as a useful tool to reassure NATO skeptics, given the considerable overlap of EU and NATO goals and membership (a point included in the white paper). For some, the question of the EU's role is moot: As Lyra told Charge, regardless of the emphasis some officials place on the EU, the medium- to long-term burden of maintaining an army of 250,000-350,000 soldiers dedicated to territorial defense was the strongest argument for Finland's entry into NATO.

Comment

19. (C) Embedded in the paper's text is the debate within the GOF about how to define the center of gravity in Finland's security policy. The media coverage of the white paper suggested a "NATO or EU" divide, given the tendency among government officials or others to emphasize the importance of one or the other. Certainly, one sees the influence of the more transatlantic-oriented NCP in the paper, reflected in the more positive treatment of NATO and the U.S., though U.S. language also reflects a general openness to the new Administration. EU supporters also had their say (as Lyra

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said, the paper contained more favorable NATO language "but then the politicians got in the way"). Nevertheless, the differences within the GOF regarding the weight and importance of the EU and NATO are not stark or polar. Ultimately, any Finnish decision regarding NATO membership will rest on public opinion about NATO, not the EU, and on the configuration of the next coalition government, the stance of the next President and the collective political will to take Finland into NATO without a majority supporting membership. End comment.

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